



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

13th November 2024

Report of the Head of Streetcare – Mike Roberts

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Improving Recycling Performance and Budget Delivery

Purpose of Report:

To provide Members with proposals to both improve recycling performance and save money, the latter as required to meet a corporate request to identify 5% financial savings for 2025/26.

Executive Summary:

A Waste Strategy Action Plan was approved by Environment and Regeneration and Street Scene Cabinet Board in April 2023.

An update report on implementation of the action plan was presented to the Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Scrutiny Committee on 19th April 2024. The update report contained a briefing note and proposals further to Measure 11 in the action plan for conducting formal consultation on increasing recycling performance, including three weekly collections of non-recyclable residual waste

and improvements to the recycling service, alongside continuing weekly collections of food waste and recyclables. The consultation exercise has been completed and further actions need to be taken to ensure the council exceeds the current Welsh Government statutory recycling performance target of 70% which is required from the end of this year.

Since completing the consultation exercise work has commenced to deliver a balanced budget for 2025/26. This work has given rise to a corporate request for all services to identify a 5% financial saving for next year. Such a saving equates to a budget reduction of £739,000 for Waste Services.

This report therefore seeks to present proposals to both improve recycling performance and reduce expenditure. The main proposals include moving to three-weekly refuse collection, alongside improving the range of weekly recycling services, and introducing charges for green waste collections which are non-statutory. Given that eight of the Council's Refuse Collection Vehicles are now due for renewal, the question is also posed whether Members wish to consider adopting the additional measures of ceasing to provide black bags for households on black sack collections and dispensing with wheeled bins for collections, instead requiring household to present refuse in black bags at their own expense for collection. If so, these extra measures would need to be included in the budget consultation process, as they have not been consulted on.

Background:

A Waste Strategy Action Plan was approved by Environment, Regeneration and Street Scene Cabinet Board in April 2023 and an update report on implementation of the action plan was presented to the Environment, Regeneration and Street Scene Scrutiny Committee on 19th April 2024. The update report contained a briefing note and proposals further to Measure 11 in the action plan for conducting

formal consultation with respect to three weekly collections of non-recyclable residual waste and also increasing recycling performance in general. This consultation exercise has now been completed and details regarding the response are given in Appendix A. Some 3740 responses were received representing a response from around 5% of households.

There are two main levers for boosting recycling performance, that is, by restricting residual waste and expanding recycling services. In Neath Port Talbot, the incremental restrictions on residual waste alongside improved recycling services have been ongoing since the early 2000's with first the move from weekly to fortnightly residual waste collections, followed by the move from 240 litre wheeled bins to 140 litre wheeled bins in the early 2010's. The next step, to further reduce the frequency of non-recyclable waste collections alongside the continued weekly collect of food waste and other recyclables has already been taken by the majority of Council's in Wales (See Appendix A). It need be recognised however, as can be seen in Appendix B, the majority of the around 5% of households that responded to the consultation were in favour of improving recycling services but against anything that restricts their ability to freely dispose of waste material as refuse.

For ease of reference, some headlines from the consultation are as follows:

Question No.	Question Detail	Headline
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:		
9	As green/garden waste collections are not required by law, I would prefer to pay a reasonable charge for the service as it stands, i.e.	73% Disagree or Strongly Disagree

	fortnightly collection if it helps protect the service	
10	<i>Residents should be able to mix paper and cardboard, so that the Council can start collecting and recycling small electrical items (e.g. toasters, shavers, kettles)</i>	69% Agree or Strongly Agree
11	<i>If other measures fail to drive up recycling rates to meet the Welsh Government's targets, the council should reduce the frequency of non-recyclable waste collection (black bags/black bins) to once every three weeks to encourage more recycling</i>	84% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
12	<i>The Council should move to a paid-for, subscription service for green/garden waste collections. For those who choose to subscribe, green/garden waste would be collected weekly*</i>	76% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
13	The Council should make changes to ensure that we recycle all separately collected nappies (and other absorbent hygiene products) on the current fortnightly collection frequency **	25% Agree or Strongly agree (53% neither agree or disagree/Don't have an opinion)
14	<i>The Council should increase the collection frequency of nappies (and other absorbent hygiene products) to weekly, and recycle all of it ***</i>	39% Agree or Strongly agree (54% neither agree or disagree/Don't have an opinion)

* Weekly green collection would only be considered if there was a move to 3 weekly non-recyclable black bin/bag waste collection

** Without additional funding, this would only be achievable alongside a three weekly non-recyclable black bin/black bag waste collection service

*** Without additional funding, this would only be achievable if the service were run alongside weekly chargeable garden waste collections

The service is currently reviewing the feedback in relation to the reported barriers to recycling identified within the consultation to inform improvements to our overall education and communications plan.

An issue for the Council is that restricting the disposal of refuse is effective at helping to drive up recycling, whilst improvements to recycling performance and cost savings are only deliverable if both residual waste is restricted and charges are made for green waste collections. Unless something changes, the service is in the position where in order to meet both its statutory waste and financial obligations, plus be in a position to deliver improvements in recycling collection that people want, it needs to increase restrictions on waste disposal and introduce charges that those responding to the Council's consultation generally would prefer not to have.

Whilst actions taken to date have had a positive impact on the Council's recycling performance, the council is still not achieving the latest statutory Welsh Government Target of 70% required from the end of this financial year. If the target is missed, as is anticipated, the Minister can be expected to ask for the council's action plan to resolve the situation to avoid the application of Welsh Government fines.

A table showing current performance is shown below:

	Q1 3 month performance	Q2 3 month performance	Q3 3 month performance	Q4 3 month performance	Out-turn 12 month accumulative
22/23	65.27	66.93	63.13	63.82	64.82
23/24	65.63	68.20	67.55	69.42	67.72
24/25	68.22				

It is noted there are some seasonal impacts largely related to green garden waste, and recycling performance has been increasing through 2023/24 as we introduced in-year improvements as part of the agreed waste strategy. Further actions are however needed to ensure the council exceeds the performance target of 70%.

Since completing the consultation exercise on improving recycling performance, corporate work is underway to deliver a balanced budget for 2025/26. This work has given rise to a request for all services to identify a 5% financial saving for next year. Such a saving equates to a budget reduction of £739,000 for Waste Services.

This report therefore seeks to present proposals to both improve recycling performance and reduce expenditure.

The main proposals include moving to three-weekly refuse collection, improving the range of weekly services, and introducing charges for green waste collections which are non-statutory. This is proposed using the current 140ltr wheeled bins (or three black bags per three weeks in black sack collection areas). As indicated this would mean moving to three weekly refuse collections for households and businesses, other than town centres where businesses could purchase a higher frequency of service from the Council if required, or buy services from a private sector provider as meets their requirements. As set out in the consultation information, three weekly collection rounds have been calculated and it is proposed that associated collection vehicles would focus on refuse only (as opposed to collecting refuse and green waste as existing). Alongside this it is also proposed, as included in the consultation, to:

- i. Collect paper and card together and introduce kerbside collection pilot for small electrical equipment;
- ii. Introduce charging for green waste collections which are non-statutory, as recommended by Welsh Government in their 'Collections Blueprint';

- iii. Introduce bookable (booked through ordering AHP bags) weekly collections for Absorbent Hygiene Products linked to weekly green waste collections.

Combined Collection of Paper and Cardboard and Introduction of Pilot collections for small electrical equipment (WEEE)

At the time of introducing our kerbside sort service, separation for onward reprocessing of paper and cardboard was preferred and a requirement by onward re-processors. However, over time the requirement to do so has changed and re-processors now widely accept the co-mingling of paper and cardboard with no detrimental impact of the rate of income return. With the increasing use of digital resources replacing things like newspapers and bank statements etc. the volume of paper within the waste stream has also been decreasing substantially.

The combining of paper and cardboard collections would reduce the number of receptacles needed to be presented at the kerbside. It would also address certain reputational elements of the collection service such as damaged lids due to them blowing around in inclement weather.

Under the Council's current collection scheme, mixing paper and cardboard is considered as contamination and should not be collected, so this change would also reduce missed collection calls in that regard as well as reduce the need for the associated awareness raising visits by the Council's Recycling Awareness and Compliance Team.

The current stock of paper boxes could be reused for glass collections with that information being clearly communicated to residents.

In order to achieve the statutory recycling targets set by the Welsh Government, the recycling service has expanded over the years, and needs to continue to do so, with the proposed introduction of small

Waste Electrical & Electronic Equipment (WEEE) at the kerbside. A pilot collection for such collections was approved as part of the Council's Waste Strategy in April 2023 but has yet to be implemented due to resource issues.

Should Members approve the combined collection of paper and cardboard, then the approved pilot for the introduction of a kerbside small WEEE collection can be facilitated and proceed without the need for additional resources given the existing 'paper bay' on the collection vehicle could be utilised for this purpose.

Furthermore, costs associated with the purchase of small WEEE sacks together with any additional cardboard sacks will be netted off by the reduced costs for the purchase of paper boxes.

Green waste charges

An issue for the Council is that restricting the disposal of refuse is effective at helping to drive up recycling, whilst improvements to recycling are only affordable, and savings achievable, if residual waste is restricted by three weekly collections and charges are made for green waste collections.

Therefore, it is proposed to implement an annual subscription charge based on 'mid-range' charges made by other Local Authorities and, based on experience elsewhere, it has been assumed 45% of households in the County Borough would take up this subscription option. Having reflected on the consultation responses and experience in other Councils the proposed charges are given below:

Up to 2 garden waste bags per weekly collection (or up to 4 bags in the case of fortnightly collections) with no charges for the bags - £26 per annum.

Up to 5 garden waste bags per weekly collection (or up to 10 bags in the case of fortnightly collections), with no charges for the bags) - £40 per annum.

For heavy users, requiring more bags per week, additional bags would be available at £4 per bag per annum.

Other Welsh Local Authorities who have introduced a subscription charge for garden waste have shown an overall decrease in the tonnage collected, with some recovery over time.

It is proposed that when residents sign up to the scheme then as done in other Council areas a short set of Terms and Conditions (to be agreed with Legal and Democratic Services) would be provided to the householder ensuring the Council's contractual obligations and resident's responsibilities are clearly set out.

In order to limit administration costs, negate the need to purchase different colour bags, and to help ensure the introduction of the scheme is successful, it is proposed the introduction of this scheme is coordinated with the introduction of the in-cab 'Live Feed' system in October 2025, which will provide the crews with real time information on which properties have an annual paid subscription and ensure that free collections are not provided to residents who may have previously purchased and presented green bags but have not signed up to the annual subscription service.

Impact on performance

The introduction of three weekly refuse collections and, consistent AHP separation, and small electrical item collections alongside continuing weekly collection of food waste and other recyclables would have a positive impact on recycling performance, whilst the introduction of green waste charges would have some negative impact as more green waste may be taken to HWRCs or be home composted (or could be placed within wheeled bins if the Council

does not move to three weekly collections given declining refuse quantities).

Looking at the experience elsewhere and local circumstances, a net recycling performance improvement of at least 2% is estimated, ensuring the Council exceeds the statutory target.

Timing

It is proposed the new service arrangements would be put in place for 1st October 2025, following the waste collection service relocating to the Transfer Station in January, and the arrival of new vehicles, and providing for one set of round re-designs so households are not faced with a series of changes to their collections. As noted above, this will also coincide with the introduction of the new in-cab 'live feed' data system which is currently being progressed.

Amended missed bin policy to accompany change

The Missed Bin Policy is due for review as part of the Council's Waste Strategy Action Plan which needs to coincide with the introduction of the In-Cab Waste Management "Live Feed" System and a draft policy is provided at Appendix C for Member approval prior to the implementation of "Live Feed" for implementation on 1st October 2025.

Amended side waste policy to accompany change

Any change to three weekly collections will undoubtedly result in an increase in applications for the Exemption Scheme. The current scheme is already due for review as part of the Council's Approved Waste Strategy Action Plan (Measure 6) due to some ongoing issues with the scheme being abused. A revised Exemption Scheme is given as Appendix D for Member approval and for consistency this Policy would also be introduced from 1st October 2025.

Communications

Effective communication of these large-scale service changes, if approved, is imperative to prepare residents for the change and ensure as smooth as possible transition.

These will be co-produced with Corporate Communication but would include, but not exclusive to:

- Future changes to collections webpage, with associated media 'blasts', including reminders closer to time of change;
- Programme of 'pop up events' across the County Borough to facilitate increased kit demand;
- Full explanatory leaflets to all households across the County Borough together with downloadable versions on the website;
- Single page poster for all households as a quick glance guide to the new service including downloadable versions on the website;
- FAQ's on both the website and the leaflets for all service changes;
- Explanatory Q & A videos on Recycle4NPT/You tube channels
- New Collection Calendars for all residents

Potential supplementary measures to further reduce costs and increase recycling:

Given that eight of the Council's refuse collection vehicles are now due for renewal, it is timely to ask Members whether they would wish to consider adopting the additional measures of ceasing to provide black bags for households on black sack collections and take the opportunity of dispensing with wheeled bins for collections, requiring

households to present refuse in black bags at their own expense for collection.

There are approximately 12% of households (some 8,200) on black bag collections for which black bags are currently provided by the Council, with an associated spend of circa £38,000 pa. (This does not include the resources required to deliver them which usually takes 4 weeks in total for the delivery teams, diverting them from their daily duties of delivering recycling equipment). The provision of black bags could be withdrawn as has already been done by most other councils. Such a proposal could be included as part of the forthcoming budget consultations.

In addition, there is the option as currently being taken forward by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council of ceasing to utilise wheeled bins for refuse collection. Residents could keep the ones they have for storage on their property if they wished, and no further bins would be provided, and residents would be required to present their refuse in black bags (of a specified maximum size that they purchase themselves) for collection.

The number of black refuse bags put out for collection could be restricted, for example to 3 bags per three weeks, as currently proposed for black sack areas. Other areas have shown that restricting refuse presentation to one bag per week is more effective than restricting refuse to one approximately sized wheeled bin per collection period because the bins effectively act as mini skips. The use of sacks can be expected to divert some more waste from landfill than three weekly savings alone, helping further to keep disposal costs down, and further contribute to the delivery of existing and future recycling targets. There would also be savings on the provision of bins going forward. The council currently spends circa £63,000 per year on the purchase of black bins.

There would also be savings in relation to collections. As stated earlier eight refuse collection vehicles are currently up for renewal.

These could be renewed with vehicles without bin lifts which would be cheaper* (and use less fuel/energy in driving the hydraulics/motors going forward), plus the vehicles would be lighter and could carry more payload before needing to be emptied. The collection of black sacks are also quicker as wheeled bins have to be moved individually and take some time to be taken back and forth to the vehicle, and time on the bin lift, whether they have one black bag's worth of material in them or three. It must be acknowledged however there would be the potential for some more spillages, for example due to animals routing through bags, with potentially increased impact on the Council's already stretched street cleansing service. There is also the potential that residents would purchase the cheapest black bags, which rip easier and could exacerbate problems further.

[(*) Circa £24 - £35k per vehicle cheaper purchase cost with an average saving also of circa £6k per year on maintenance costs of the lifts per vehicle]

This potential supplementary measure is only included in the report as, if there was a desire to look at it after the decision by RCTCBC, now would be the time to consider the matter with a large part of the refuse fleet coming up for renewal.

Dispensing with the use of wheeled bins would very much be a supplementary measure. It is not a substitute measure for reducing refuse collection frequency or introducing green waste collection charges as in itself, dispensing with the use of wheeled bins for collection would not deliver the increase in recycling performance, or the budget savings required. If there were a decision to implement black bag collections for everyone with residents providing their own bags, then the performance impact could be increased by implementing a limit of 2 bags per fortnight in the absence of a move to three weekly collections. However, the savings would be nowhere near enough to introduce other required recycling improvements or achieve the service's saving target. The latter would be particularly the case if savings were used to increase street cleaning capacity alongside collection rounds.

Financial Impacts:

A move to three weekly collections of non-recyclable waste together with charged-for weekly green waste collections, an improved weekly AHP collection service, and the introduction of small electrical and electronic equipment waste collections is expected to deliver a net saving in accordance with the corporate budget saving target for the service of 5% (£739,000 per annum), which would be realised through a combination of reduced disposal costs and increased recycling income totalling £250,000, together with the net income from the green waste charges of £489,000. Some savings associated with the reduction in collection costs for non-recyclable waste would be used to fund part of the service improvements for AHP collections.

Ceasing the provision of black sacks if taken forward would save £38k per annum

Ceasing the use of wheeled bins for collection with a one bag per week limit would save an estimated net £338,000 per annum made up of: reduced disposal costs/increased recycling income of £125k per annum; savings associated with a reduction in collection costs of £250k per annum; a reduction in the cost of providing wheeled bins of £63k per annum, less the provision of funding for an additional cleansing crew at a cost of £100K to track collection areas.

If Members were minded not to implement three weekly collections or green waste collection charges then the corporate savings requirement cannot be met, and no other recycling improvements other than small electrical item collections can be afforded. If Members were minded to implement only one or other of three weekly and chargeable green collections, then a choice has to be made between service improvements or savings. In particular, in relation to green waste collection charges alone, which could be expected to reduce overall recycling performance, it is suggested that

income should be invested in recycling service enhancement (through weekly AHP and green waste collections) which would similarly lead to no savings being achieved.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

To assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The following assessments are included in the Appendices:

A Stage 1 screening assessment for improvements to weekly recyclable collections which indicate a full assessment is not required;

A Stage 2 Integrated Impact Assessment for the introduction of three weekly non-recycling collections and green waste charges;

A Stage 2 Integrated Impact Assessment for the updated Missed Collections Policy;

A Stage 2 Integrated Impact Assessment for the revised 'No Side Waste' Policy; and,

A Stage 1 Integrated Impact Assessment for supplementary measures of ceasing provision of black bins and bags the proposals to be considered further, after consultation as part of the budget round, if Members resolve to take the matter forward;

Valleys Communities Impacts:

Valley communities, as all others, would be affected by the proposed changes.

Workforce Impacts:

There are no job losses or adverse workforce impacts associated with the proposed changes. There would be no changes in waste driver/loader roles, but there would be some redeployment of employees between the collection of different material streams, e.g. from refuse to recycling, and this would firstly be considered with staff on a voluntary basis. Without a move to three weekly collections, increased AHP collections would require more staff.

Legal Impacts:

No implications save where set out in this report.

Risk Management Impacts:

The Council runs the risk of reputational damage if the national statutory recycling target is not achieved, would face the financial risks of identifying savings of equal value from elsewhere to achieve a balanced budget, could face fines from Welsh Government if statutory performance targets are not met which would increase budgetary pressures (of order £130,000 per percentage point missed per year), and would have to contend with further financial risks generally if overall waste management costs are not kept to a minimum in the context of recycling collections needing to expand and improve.

Crime and Disorder Impacts:

There would be the potential for some additional fly tipping with any move to three weekly collections by householders not prepared to engage in recycling. Similarly, there would be the potential for some additional fly tipping of green waste for those residents who refuse to sign up to the green waste subscription service.

Many Council's in Wales have already implemented the proposed changes and their experience with respect to fly tipping was looked at alongside the consultation. In summary the feedback is 'nothing to worry about after an initial settling in period', noting the council has in place education and enforcement resources which can be deployed to help residents adjust to the new arrangements.

Consultation:

The proposed changes have been the subject to external consultation. The supplementary measures, if Members were minded to pursue them, would be included in the forthcoming budget consultation.

Scrutiny Committee Observations:

To be inserted after scrutiny committee

Recommendations:

Having due regard to the Integrated Impact Assessments it is recommended that Members:

- i. Approve the combining of paper and card kerbside collections and the introduction of small electrical item kerbside collections;
- ii. Approve the updated Missed Collections Policy with a further review after the implementation of the in-cab 'live feed' system set out in Appendix C of this report;
- iii. Approve the revised 'No Side Waste' Policy set out in Appendix D of this report;
- iv. Determine whether to:

- a. Implement three weekly refuse collections on the basis identified in this report and approve expanding the current pilot to fully roll out weekly kerbside AHP collections: or
 - b. Not implement a proposal to move to three weekly refuse collections.
- v. Determine whether to:
 - a. Implement a green waste collection charge on the basis detailed in the report and if so delegate authority to the Head of Streetcare in consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Cabinet Member for Street Scene to agree the necessary short set of Terms and Conditions to accompany a chargeable green waste collection service and approve expanding the current pilot to fully roll out weekly kerbside AHP collections; or
 - b. Not implement a green waste collection charge.
- vi. Determine whether to:
 - a. Include the potential supplementary measures to discontinue the provision of black sacks and the use of wheeled bins for refuse collection in the forthcoming budget consultation; or
 - b. Not include the potential supplementary measures to discontinue the provision of black sacks and the use of wheeled bins for refuse collection in the forthcoming budget consultation.

Appendices:

- Appendix A – Waste Collection & Performance Details of Welsh LA's
- Appendix B – Analysis of the Outcome of the Public

		Consultation
Appendix C	–	Proposed updated Missed Collections Policy
Appendix D	–	Proposed revised No Side Waste Policy
Appendix E1-E4	–	Integrated Impact Assessments

List of Background Papers:

Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Scrutiny Committee
Report of 19th April 2024 – Update on the implementation of
measures in the Waste Strategy Action Plan

Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Service Cabinet Report
of 14th April 2023 – Waste Strategy Action Plan

Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Service Scrutiny
Committee of 3rd March 2023 – Consider recommendations to the
Waste Strategy Report

All Members Seminar and presentations of 13th October 2022 and
16th February 2023

Environment and Highways Scrutiny Committee of 28th January 2018
– [No Side Waste Policy](#), [Appendix](#)

Environment and Highways Cabinet Board of 17th December 2015 –
[Missed Bin Policy](#)

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